

## II. North Downtown Context

The North Downtown planning area, for the purposes of this report, encompasses all of the Denny Triangle Neighborhood, most of the South Lake Union Neighborhood, and a portion of the Belltown Neighborhood east of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. (See Figure 5.) The boundaries of this area were determined by major transportation corridors and the topographic ridgeline occurring roughly along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The project area has historically been dominated by commercial and light industrial uses such as automobile dealerships, warehousing, commercial laundries, and other similar activities. However, the area is changing rapidly. The following sections describe the factors affecting these changes and projects a picture of the future on which to base the park needs and development strategy.

*Figure 5. Boundaries of the North Downtown Planning Area with Respect to the Greater Downtown Area.*







Figure 6. Aerial Photograph of the Study Area.

## Rapidly Changing Development Context

The North Downtown area is changing dramatically. Figure 7 below shows substantial concentrations of development activity occurring in the eastern portion of Denny Triangle, in the Cascade neighborhood and in the central portion of the South Lake Union. Much of the land in the planning area is held by multi-block ownerships. (See Figure 8.) Plans are in place to create new facilities for Seattle's burgeoning bio-tech industry. University of Washington research facilities were recently sited in South Lake Union with significant growth opportunities. Also, Cornish School of the Arts recently moved their Capitol Hill campus to the Denny Triangle, contributing to the diversity of the area. Considering much of the land in the planning area is underdeveloped at current zoning, new development is likely to create major changes in the visual character of this area.

In the spring of 2003, Mayor Greg Nickels launched a "South Lake Union Agenda" program to provide the infrastructure and neighborhood improvements necessary to encourage and support job and housing growth. Land Use Code amendments designed to accommodate the unique characteristics of research and development laboratories in South Lake Union have subsequently been approved by the City. Substantial revisions to the City's Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Code now under consideration will increase height limits and encourage increased housing densities in Denny Triangle.

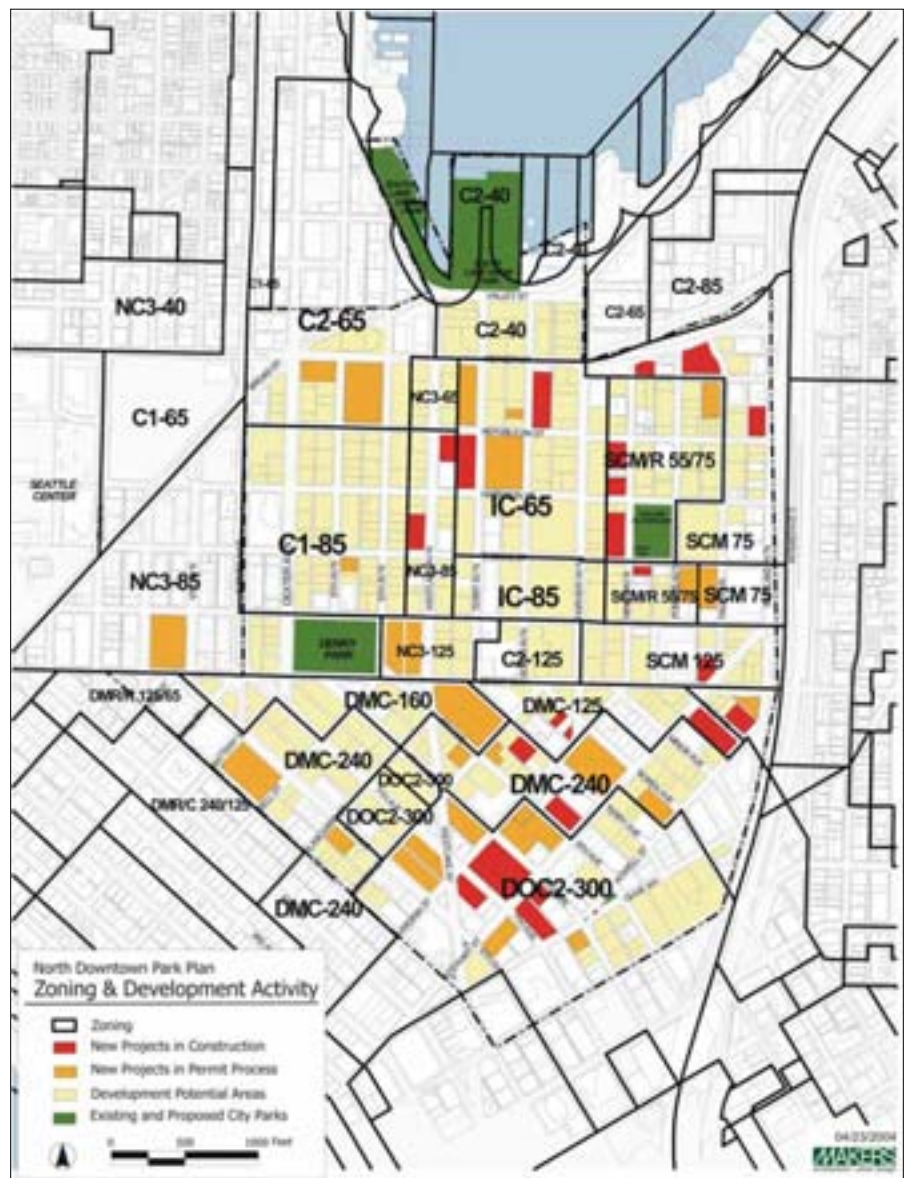


Figure 7. Zoning and Current Development Activity.



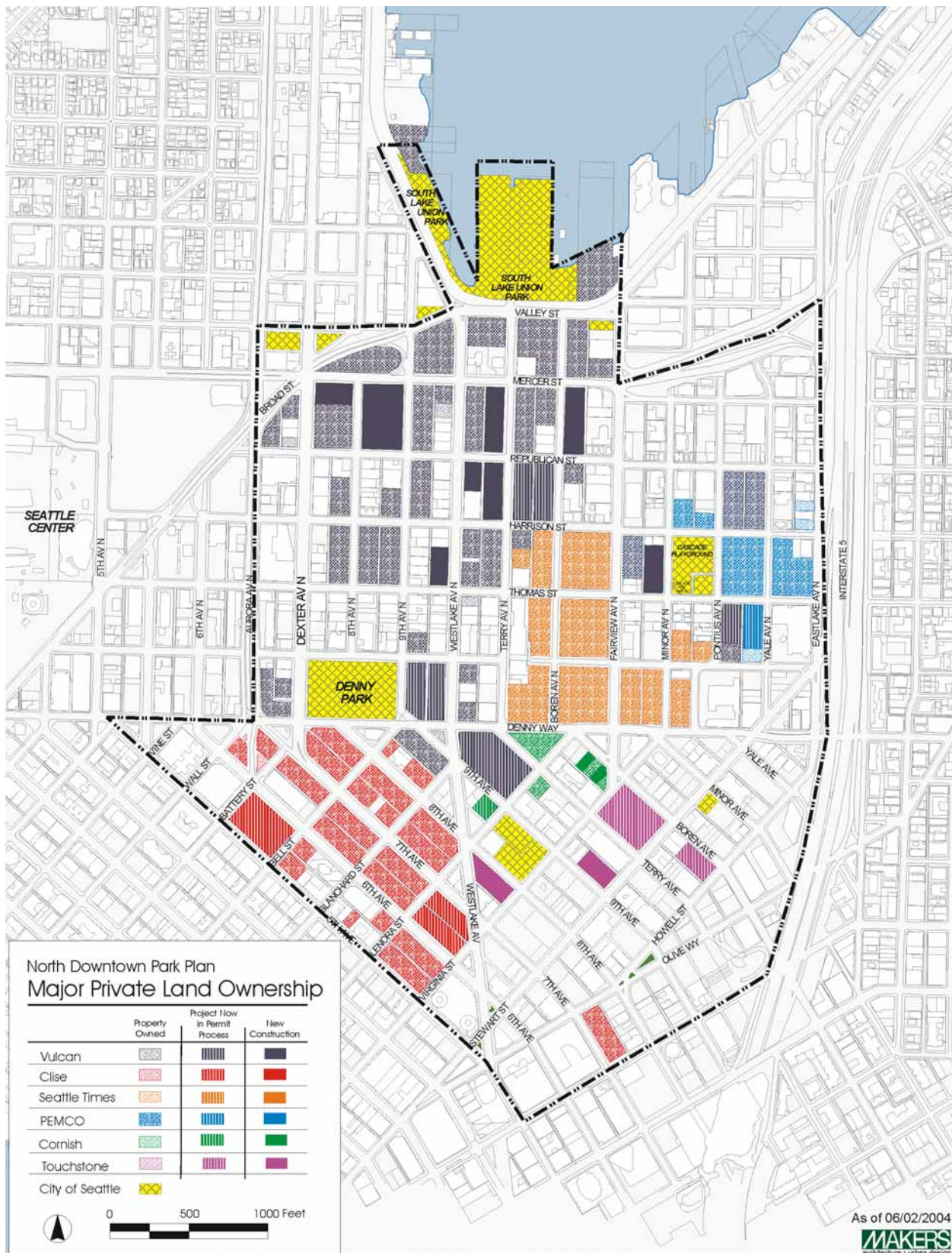


Figure 8. Major Private Land Ownerships and Relevant Construction Activity.

## Park Resources

Park resources in the area to support projected housing and job growth over the next twenty years are limited. The North Downtown planning area currently contains three public parks and urban plazas, for a total of 20.8 acres of open space. All three public parks - South Lake Union Park, Cascade Playground, and Denny Park - are within the South Lake Union neighborhood. Denny Triangle contains only 2.3 acres of open space – all in the form of urban plaza-type spaces developed in conjunction with office buildings.

The new South Lake Union Park (12 acres), being created from the former Naval Reserve facility on a peninsula between Waterway 3 and 4, will eventually be a significant park resource for the neighborhood as well as the rest of the city. It will be a very urban park with a wharf and maritime activities as its central focus. An initial phase of park development will occur on a portion of the property in 2004-05.

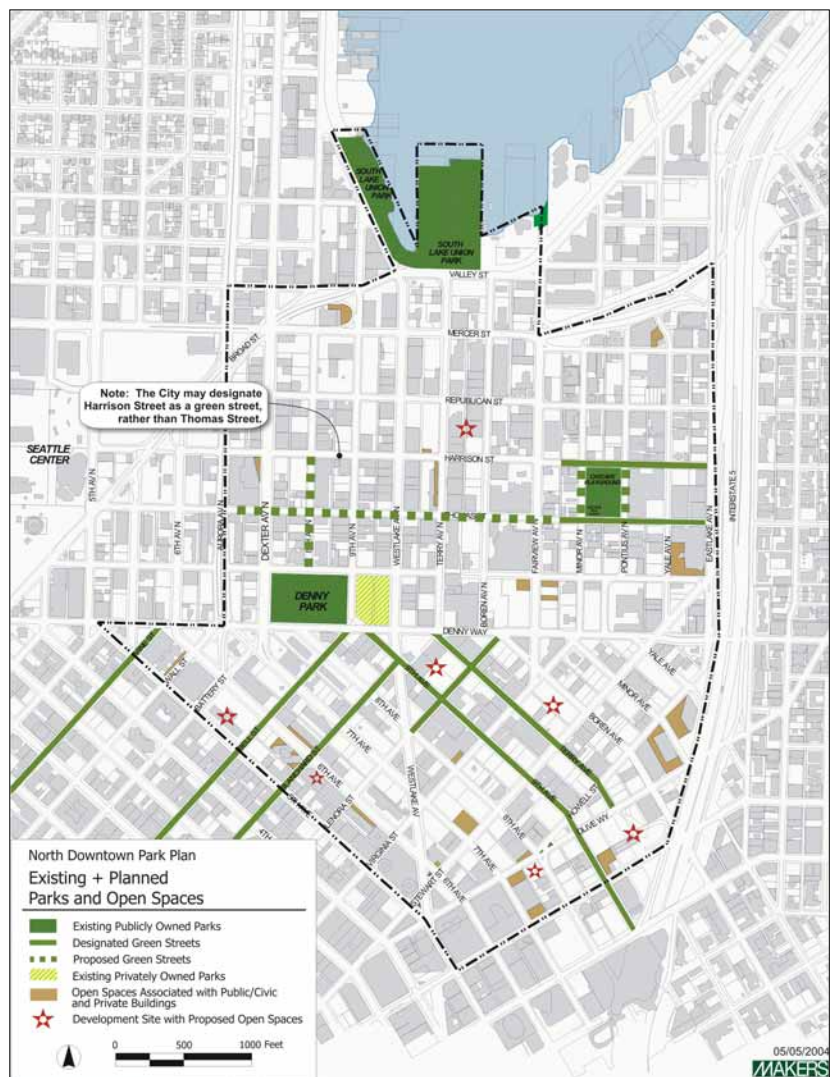
The 1.9-acre Cascade Playground serves as the focal point for the Cascade neighborhood in the eastern part of South Lake Union. Joint public-private funded playground improvements will be implemented this year.

Denny Park, home of Seattle Parks & Recreation's administrative offices, is Seattle's oldest park. The passive, 4.6-acre open space located north of Denny Way is not well used.

Denny Playfield is a temporary, privately owned park facility featuring a small soccer field and basketball court. However, this site will soon be converted to commercial development and the North Downtown area's only space for active recreation will be lost.

Although there is consideration for acquiring a small park site in the eastern portion of Denny Triangle in 2004, there is no money available for park development at this time.

*Figure 9. Existing and Planned Parks and Open Spaces.*





## Circulation Context and Plans

Major circulation routes and freeway connections have long produced major impacts on the North Downtown area. The City is now conducting a comprehensive transportation study to support the projected growth of the area. Project goals are to improve mobility and access for pedestrians, transit, bicycles, and vehicles within and between South Lake Union, surrounding neighborhoods, and downtown Seattle. A major emphasis of the study is the improvement of the Mercer Street corridor. Current plans call for the redevelopment of Mercer Street to provide a two-way connection between Seattle Center and Interstate-5. In this scenario, Valley Street would be converted to a smaller, park and pedestrian-compatible roadway. Other components of the study are the reconfiguration of Westlake and 9<sup>th</sup> Avenues from one-way couplet to two-way streets and new grade-separated crossings over Aurora Avenue N at Thomas and/or Harrison Streets.

The ongoing transportation study is also looking for ways to enhance bicycle and pedestrian access within the area. Current proposals are shown in Figure 10 to the right.

Two mass transit projects are proposed or planned for the area:

- A streetcar system and subsequent streetscape improvements along Westlake Avenue and portions of Terry Avenue N, Valley Street, and Fairview Avenue N.
- A monorail route with stations along the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor.

Both projects would provide close connections to the existing bus tunnel and planned light rail stations in downtown.



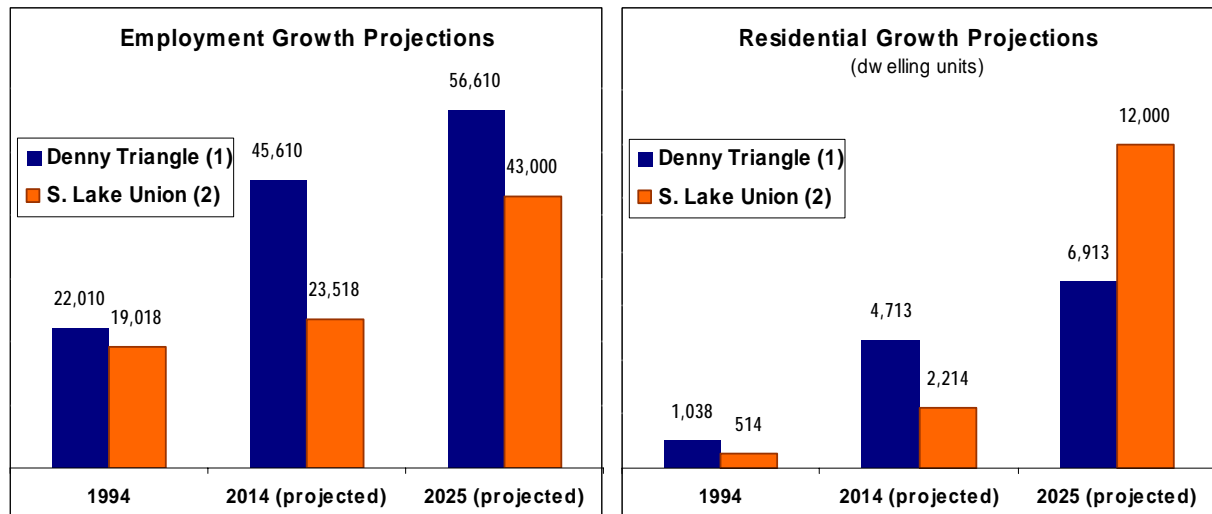
Figure 10. Transportation Projects.

# Future Context

## Growth Projections

A recent growth capacity model prepared for the South Lake Union projects 11,000 new housing units and 23,000 new jobs by 2025. Previous estimates from the 1994 Seattle Comprehensive Plan had projected much lower growth. Significant growth had already been projected by the Comprehensive Plan for the Denny Triangle: 45,610 total jobs and 4,700 residential units by 2014. Given new and planned construction in the area, these projections appear to be on-target. These projections are shown in Table 1 below.

*Table 1. Residential and Employment Growth Projections*



**Notes:**

1. Denny Triangle growth estimates are based on continuing the same growth rate as projected by the Seattle Comprehensive Plan for the period between 1994 and 2014.
2. South Lake Union estimates based on Heartland's projections in the South Lake Union Capacity Model memo dated October, 2003.

## Future Land Use and Development Character

Along with this projected growth will be major changes in the development character of the planning area. For the Denny Triangle, planning participants and property owners envision more “Vancouver-Style” towers surrounded by a variety of open spaces. Closer to the Central Business District will be concentrations of commercial and office uses. Core areas of the Denny Triangle are likely to be a mix of residential and office uses – which will complement Cornish School.

The South Lake Union area is expected to be developed with low-rise to mid-rise buildings. Properties along the lakefront are expected to be mixed-use with an emphasis on commercial development, whereas the core area of South Lake Union between Mercer and Thomas Streets, Westlake Avenue and Fairview Avenue N is already becoming the hub for bio-tech uses. The Cascade neighborhood will remain a mixed-use neighborhood with a focus on housing. With the proposed streetcar line and surrounding mix of bio-tech and residential uses, Westlake Avenue has the opportunity to become one of Seattle’s finest urban commercial streets. Furthermore, the area west of Westlake Avenue N, save for the Dexter Avenue N corridor, is likely to see significant new residential development integrated with a variety of street level commercial and office uses.



Figure 11. Projected Future Land Uses, Development Character, and Land Uses in the North Downtown Area.



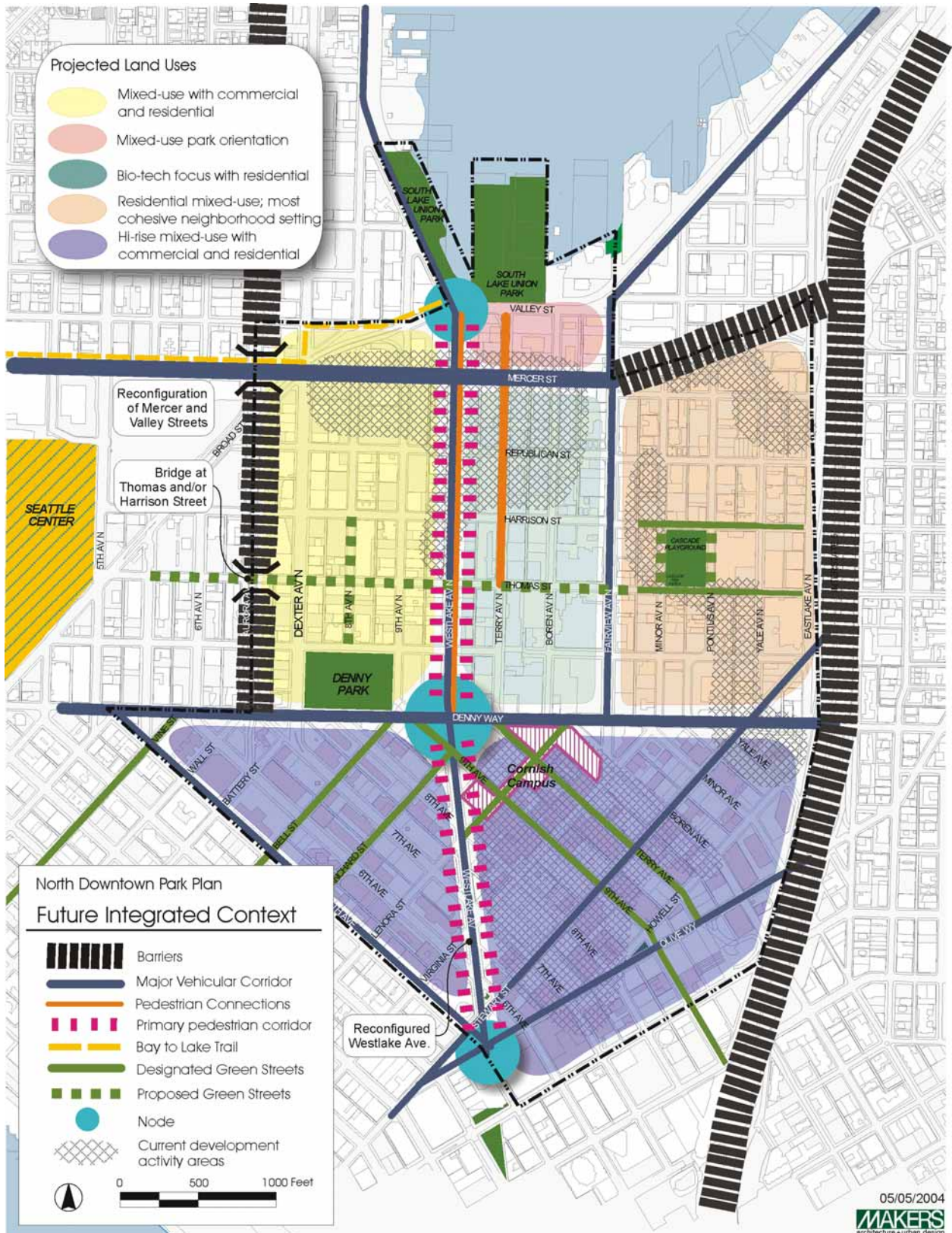


Figure 12. Future Integrated Concept of the North Downtown Area.